William (Willie) Firth





Rank: - Private

Number: - 2481

Regiment: - Royal Munster Fusiliers 7th Battalion

Died of Wounds: - 23rd August 1915 aged 23 years

Memorial: - Helles Memorial, Turkey Panels 186-192.

Batley News, 18 Sep 1915 (photo)

Family Details:

William was born in October 1892 in Batley to James and Minnie (nee Birkhead) Firth. The couple had married at Carlinghow St. John's on 30th May 1891. James was a miner and Minnie a soap packer. William was the eldest of three children born to Liversedge born James and Minnie who came from Birstall. Harold was born in 1894 and Phyllis in 1899.

In 1901 the family was living at 11, Crescent Street, Cross Bank, Batley. James was a coal miner hewer.

A decade later James had been promoted to be a Pit Deputy, below ground, and William was a coal miner hewer whilst Harold was working as a contract coal miner hurrier below ground. The family had moved to a three roomed home at 28, North Bank Road, Cross Bank, Batley. They moved yet again before 1915 to 44, Ruby Street, Carlinghow and at the time of the memorial at Helles they had moved yet again to 5, Richmond Street, Cross Bank.

From being a young child William was a member of Batley Salvation Army Sunday School. As a young man he joined the Salvation Army Band and later the Birstall Old Band, latterly playing the cornet in Batley Old Band. It was reported that William had taken up the violin as a boy but changed to the cornet and would be remembered as an efficient player.

He was an esteemed member of St. John's Church Institute, Carlinghow and was popular with all who knew him.

Before the war started, he worked at Brodsworth Main Colliery.

Service Details:

Soon after the outbreak of hostilities William joined the Munster Fusiliers at Doncaster and trained for seven months at Curragh Camp in Ireland and later at Basingstoke. The Munster Fusiliers were attached to 30th Brigade in 10th (Irish) Division.

They were inspected by Lord Kitchener at Hackwood Park on 29/30 May 1915 and on 27th June were given the orders to prepare for service in Gallipoli.

Divisional H.Q. of the Munster Fusiliers embarked at Liverpool on 9th July and by the end of the months most units had assembled at Lemnos. In early 1915 the British, in trying to seize a strategic advantage by capturing Constantinople, ordered an attack on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

On 6/7th August the Division had landed at Sula Bay and made an attack on Chocolate Hill 7/8th August. Unfortunately, the leaders did not press forward but observed from their ships. A War Correspondent Ashmead-Bartlett described Sunday 8th August as hot and a day of rest for the army with no sign of an advance or any shots being fired by the Turks on the war ships. The British cooked breakfast on the beach and drank cups of tea and by mid-morning, unaccustomed to the summer heat, the sun was sapping their strength. Lethargy set in and the reserve units went bathing off the beaches.

On 15th August De Lisle took over the command and it was decided that they should try to meet up with the Australians at Anzac Cove. To achieve this on the 21st August the 29th Division was to attack Scimitar Hill, the 11th (Northern) would take W Hills and the Australians would assault Hill 60 from Anzac Cove. There was dense fog and the troops attacking W. Hills lost their way and the assault fizzled out in confusion. In one day there were over 5,300 casualties.

In his last letter home, which was received after the news of his death read as follows---

"You will wonder what the matter is, but don't worry if you don't happen to hear from me regularly. I am quite well at present, but I feel as if I want a rest. I have been in action three times and it is like going into hell for a time, but I am proud to be able to tell you that we have kept our good name and have done good work here. Our officers are made of the real stuff and they prove themselves to be able to work thoroughly. I have seen some brave men die, and die nobly. The finest captain you ever heard of is with us. He inspires confidence, and makes his men cool and defiant. He leads his men on to win. We love him, and would do any mortal thing for him. I am in the first line of trenches but it is quiet just now. I often wonder when your letters will come. I long to hear from you. I wonder where my brother Harold (a soldier at the Front) is? But don't get worried about us. We are alright and when this terrible war is ended, we shall both come back to you safe and sound. "

According to a communication received from the Infantry Records Office at Leeds, Willie died of wounds on 23rd August. His records state he was "on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship "Salta" "when he died.

It is likely he was buried at sea therefore he has no known grave.

His parents received many letters of condolence and amongst them was one from the Leeds Branch of the Salvation Army, of which his mother was a member.

"We have heard from Captain Brown of Batley, that your son Willie has been killed in the Dardanelles and I wish to express on behalf of Brigadier Bennett and the staff at this office, our deepest sympathy with you and Mr. Firth at the present time. You have the consciousness that your son has given his life for his country, and we trust that he will also find peace with God. We have no doubt that the lessons learned taught him in the Army when a boy would be with him all the way through."

A memorial service was held for him at the Batley Salvation Army Rooms the following Sunday.

He was awarded the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Willie is remembered with Honour on Batley War Memorial, St John's Church, Carlinghow, Batley Salvation Army, Helles Memorial and the Irish casualties of WW1.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group